Logical Fallacies

A logical fallacy is an argumentative statement that appears to be valid but upon examination has serious flaws; "errors in reasoning that lead to invalid conclusions." Writers would be encouraged to search their argument for these types of flaws and eliminate them.

Ad Hominem (to the man): the writer attacks the opponent's character rather than the argument.
Example: "I'm sure the good senator would have a better response to our fiscal proposition if he'd spent more time studying the issues and less time cheating on his wife."

Bandwagon appeal: the writer validates a point by saying that "everyone believes this."
Example: "All right-minded people agree that Chrysler is a superior car company." (Bandwagon usually uses 'in-group' tactics, suggesting that if you want to be right-minded, or smart, or beautiful--you will do what other smart, beautiful people do.)

Begging the Question: the writer presents as truth that which is supposed to be proven by the argument.
Example: All useless bills such as Reform Bill 13 should be repealed.

Either/Or Thinking: when the writer suggests that there are only two sides to an issue: right and wrong.
Example: If colleges cancel need-based scholarships, underprivileged children will not be able to attend college. (Many underprivileged children would still qualify for academic and ability-based scholarships.)

False Analogy: an extended comparison used as proof that does not satisfy the argument requirements because the two items being compared do not have a valid relationship.
Example: Putting teenagers in sex-education classes is like taking an alcoholic to a bar. (Are the things being compared even similar? Does that prove anything?)

Generalization: conclusions are drawn from a sample that is too small.
Example: I have had two poodles. Both have attacked me. Poodles are vicious dogs.

Hypostatization: uses abstract concepts as if they were concrete reality.
Examples: "History has taught us... " or "Science has proven ..." (suggests that all scientists and historians agree and that all people have learned the same lesson.)

Non Sequitur (it doesn't follow): conclusion is not a logical result of the facts.
Example: She's a good mathematician; she'll make a good math teacher.

Post Hoc Thinking (post hoc, ergo propter hoc: after this, therefore because of this): this fallacy occurs when one assumes that because one event follows another in time, the first event caused the second.

Example: You pass by a black cat. A safe falls on your head. You conclude that black cats are bad luck. Many superstitions are the result of post hoc fallacies.

Quick fix: using catchy phrases or popular expressions to motivate readers to believe your point.
Example: "Technology in the classroom prepares students for life-long learning in the global marketplace of the 21st Century."

Red Herring: an irrelevant point to divert the reader's attention from the main issue.
Example: Your mom thinks you spend too much time playing video games. You bring up that she spends too much time shopping. The shopping is a red herring, since the original issue was video games.

Slippery Slope: suggestion that a minor action will lead to major and sometimes ludicrous consequences.
Example: If you give in every time your baby cries and he always gets what he wants, he will end up in prison because you never set any limits.

Straw Man: an attack on the opposition at its weakest or most insignificant point of contention.
Example: You rob a pharmacy of $7000 and a bottle of pills for your sick daughter. At your trial, you say that your daughter needed the medicine, or she would have died. You do not mention the $7000. This is a straw man because the pharmacy is probably more interested in the money than the pills for the sick daughter.